

How to Advance Liberty

A LEARNING, NOT A SELLING, PROBLEM

Leonard E. Read



Recorded on March 10, 1965

as Album No. 12

in FEE's Long Playing Seminar Library

The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc.

Irvington-on-Hudson, New York

There would be no need to work for liberty were liberties not being lost. Most Americans are unaware of a decline in individual liberty, and the reason is obvious: the decline rarely takes the form of sudden personal deprivations but, instead, takes the form of unnoticed erosion and, thus, we come, as do the Russians, to regard whatever state we are in as a normal condition.

No one can possibly be expected to give a top priority to the advancement of liberty unless he is keenly aware that liberty is important, and that it is in jeopardy. Each individual must make his own assessment but here is my appraisal of how precarious our situation is:

While the returns of our own socialistic revolution -- devolution is a more accurate word -- toward political omnipotence are incomplete and the full extent of the blight far from evident, the devolution itself is a fait accompli, water over the dam. It is no longer an event of the future to be feared; it is a catastrophe of the past to be remedied -- and remembered. In short, the devolution WAS, that is, the socialistic objective has been achieved. Few people seem to appreciate the terrible fact that, already, we are subject to a centralized government of unlimited power. There now hangs over our economy a political apparatus with the authority to exercise control over the life and livelihood of every citizen; it can confiscate every dollar of our income. The principle of statism is accepted national policy; short of a successful intellectual and moral counter evolution, all that remains is to await the filling in of the authoritarian details and to suffer the consequences.

It is one thing to affirm the decline; it is quite another matter, however, to suggest the tactics or methods that will free our society from socialism. The removal of socialism from our midst would restore free market and private property practices, these being fundamental to any meaningful concept of individual liberty. This is to say that liberty is not something we design and construct but, instead, is a felicitous situation in which people find themselves once authoritarianism is abandoned. No more is required for clean water or clear air or peaceful human relationships than to remove the pollutions.

To get the subject of this lecture in proper perspective, it is necessary for students of liberty to realize that our problem is two-fold. The first task is to master the free market, private property, limited government philosophy itself, this being a necessary preface to socialism's disappearance. Secondly, we must decide how best to spread the acquired knowledge. The first has to do with our own ideology, and this is a matter of self-education. The second has to do with tactics, that is, the methods to be employed in advancing liberty.

While there has to be a philosophy or ideology before there is any need for a method to spread it, I am convinced that the mastery of good method -- once one arrives at the point where it is needed -- becomes the more important of the two. For correct methodology is

itself the practice of liberty, and practice is the best of all possible instruction. Indeed, were everyone to employ proper educational techniques, there wouldn't be an ideological problem in the first place, a point which I hope will become apparent in the course of my remarks.

Unfortunately, liberty may suffer more from her friends than from her enemies; for a philosophy, like a person, is often known by the company it keeps. A philosophy will likely be held in contempt if its supporters are bad-mannered, pestiferous, holier-than-thou, know-it-all, reformatory, eager-beaver -- in a word, if they radiate that characteristic which I call be-like-me-ness. What I wish critically to scrutinize here is an attitude of mind which finds expression in the all-too-common questions, "How can I insinuate my ideas into so-and-so's thinking?" or "How can I reach the masses?" Liberty will never prosper at the hands of such supporters, for their method is at fault; it is the opposite of what is required. Perhaps I can put it another way: their eye is cast in the wrong direction.

The very first question in exploring sound methodology is, in which direction or at what should the eye be cast? The answer is to be found in one's major premise or basic datum line or fundamental point of reference -- and nowhere else. Find the answer to such questions as these: At what am I aiming? What is my life's objective? My earthly purpose? Is it to see how long I can live? Or how affluent I can become in worldly goods? Or how much fame I can gain before men? Or how much power I can exert over other human beings? I do not condemn others for cherishing aims no higher than these, but such aims hardly inspire me to any dedicated effort on their behalf. And if liberty were the sole means for the attainment of these mundane ends, not many would stand shoulder to shoulder for liberty; no one would give his life for liberty. However, this need give us little concern, for when questions as to life's purpose are posed in such naked form, most people shy away from affirmative answers -- even though they may never have given any thought as to a major premise.

The first step in sound methodology is to find a satisfactory major premise. Frankly, it is folly to discuss ideological or philosophical questions or educational methods unless all parties are aware of each other's assumptions. For example, suppose you, with your life's objective unannounced, were discussing social security with one whose concealed life's aim is to see how many human heads he can collect. The more you argue, the greater will be the misunderstanding. The discussion cannot rise above utter nonsense, as is the case with so many of today's windy and meaningless debates. We must, as a starter, know the importance of a premise, and then find one -- that is, if we would work effectively in liberty's vineyard.

The first rule, when searching for a premise, is to find one that can be adhered to -- come hell or high water. The second rule is to go as deep into idealism as possible, for any shallow premise

will serve only when discussing peripheral or shallow subjects. Get one that will do service on any matter that may pass through an inquiring mind, one so deeply embedded in a concept of rightness that, once embraced, you would never foresake!

Let me share my own premise with you, not with the idea that you take it as yours but, rather, that you may better follow my reasoning on methodology. Then, knowing my premise will make clear why I think the eye should be cast in a direction opposite to that generally urged upon us.

I reflected on the most difficult of all questions: What is man's earthly purpose? I could find no answer without bumping head-on into three of my fundamental assumptions:

The first is founded on the observation that man did not create himself, for it is easily demonstrable that man knows practically nothing about himself. Thus, my first assumption is the primacy and supremacy of an Infinite Consciousness.

The second assumption is also demonstrable: the expansibility of the individual consciousness. It is possible for the individual to gain in consciousness, awareness, perception.

The third assumption I only know but cannot demonstrate: the immortality of the individual spirit or consciousness -- this earthly moment not being all there is to existence.

With these assumptions in mind, the answer to man's earthly purpose comes clear. It is to expand one's own consciousness, as nearly as possible, into a harmony with Infinite Consciousness. Or, in lay terms, it is to see how nearly one can come, during his earthly moment, to realizing those creative potentialities peculiar to self, each of us being unique as regards potentialities.

In a word, my major premise is individual growth, emergence, evolution in consciousness, perception, awareness. Hatching might be even a better word than growth. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, put it amusingly when he said we are on earth as in an egg, that one can't be a good egg forever, that one must either hatch or rot. In any event, with this highly personal objective as a major premise, I can now listen to anyone's proposal or examine one of my own ideas and analyze the proposal or idea in the light of the premise. Should either one turn out to be antagonistic to this adopted life purpose, I must, perforce, conclude it is wrong. If, on the other hand, the proposal or idea is found to promote and harmonize with my objective, I must conclude it is sound, moral, proper; I stand in its favor.

This is not to demand that anyone else adopt the premise I have chosen and found satisfactory. But I do urge the adoption of a major premise by each serious student of liberty, for it is a necessary foundation for clear and consistent thinking. Unless one is

anchored to a fundamental objective, one's position on important questions cannot help being determined by the winds of fickle opinion, by the vogues of the moment, by popular chit-chat. And try to find a premise to which universality can rationally be conceded, that is, a premise you would be happy to have all human beings adopt and live by. Unless it can meet this test, it is not in tune with human growth, emergence, evolution.

We need not labor the point that individual growth presupposes individual liberty, for this is self-evident. Therefore, any premise not requiring liberty as a condition of attainment can be cast aside as too shallow.

Reverting to my premise, the casual observer is likely to think it too egocentric, that in its emphasis on self-improvement it centers attention on self to the exclusion of others. On the contrary, it is only in self-improvement that one can have any influence whatsoever on the improvement of others. This point may never come clear unless we know why so few of us feel any need for self-improvement while so many of us possess an overpowering itch to improve others. Why do we spend so much more time looking down than up?

The answer, I believe, lies in a failure to recognize our abysmal ignorance. In his remarkable book, Human Destiny, ^{1/} the French scientist, du Nouy, points out that the image man has built up of the universe rests on reactions determined in him by less than one-trillionth of the vibrations surrounding him -- that less than one vibration in a trillion leaves any trace in his consciousness. Now, what do we do? Instead of acknowledging the immensity of the unknown and comparing ourselves with it, we compare ourselves with our ignorant fellows which, of course, makes you and me look pretty good, at least to ourselves. No one -- not even those we call geniuses, or on whom we confer Ph.D.'s and medals of honor, or elect to high office -- has accomplished more than an infinitesimal escape from ignorance.

We can bring the human situation into the perspective I wish to portray by thinking of the human race to which we belong as virtual know-nothings, as two-legged organisms barely breaking out of the shell into a potential state of self-consciousness, and with some brand new faculties: the power of choice, the possibility of perceiving abstract ideas and, now and then, the emergence of one who begins to show signs of conceiving ideas. This appraisal, I concede, is an affront to the traditional way of looking at mankind, but let him who contends otherwise convincingly demonstrate his exaltedness.

Anyway, with this picture in mind of man just beginning an escape from ignorance, reflect on a world of imperfect individuals, all with the eye cast down on the imperfection of others, that is, with each

^{1/} Now available in paperback. A Mentor book. 60¢.

devoting his time and thought to bringing others into his own imperfect state. Improvement of either self or others is out of the question. This process is utterly absurd. A bit of doggerel comes to mind:

And so I hold it is not treason
To advance a simple reason
For the sorry lack of progress we decry.
It is this: Instead of working
On himself, each man is shirking
And trying to reform some other guy. 2/

Let us now assume a major premise of individual growth, emergence, hatching. Self-improvement becomes the lode star. No eyes are cast downward on those thought to know less, but all eyes turn upward toward those thought to know more. Each person is seeking those fragments of truth which he does not presently possess. Each individual is always reaching higher than self; he looks "over his head," as the saying goes, for facts, ideas, knowledge, wisdom. Instead of trying to make others into reflections of himself, he tries to gain an understanding helpful to others should they choose to seek that which he possesses. He gives no thought to insinuating his ideas into the consciousness of any person but, rather, seeks to garner ideas others may desire to draw on. He divests himself of any desire to "tell others off," in order that he may devote himself to a program of asking. Instead of associating with people to "set them straight," he gravitates toward those who can give him light. He no longer engages in the utterly futile project of fighting the ignorance in others but tries as best he can to escape from the ignorance he finds in himself. This, I submit, is to place man in a role quite the opposite of what we observe on every hand.

There are numerous reasons why ears are deaf to counsel such as this. One is that man's instincts, born of an ill-founded and false sense of omniscience, revolt at this concentration on self, for they think of this as beneath their earthly role. They have been given mankind to repair; fie on the minor and unnecessary project of personal growth. And, at the very least, most men fail to see how one who concentrates on self-perfection could possibly have a hand in elevating the human situation.

The Count of Oropesa, more than four centuries ago, had a passion to reform the world. A Spanish Saint, San Pedro of Alcantara, gave him the kind of counsel I am urging upon everyone who would advance liberty:

May your Lordship not torment yourself: there is a remedy for this deluge of crimes. Let us be, you and me, that which we should be. There will be two less souls to convert. Let each person behave thus: it is the most efficacious of reforms. The trouble is, that no one wants to correct himself and everyone

meddles at correcting others: thus everything stays as is. 3/

There is more on the side of self-perfection, however, than simply the saving of self. Anyone who studies the art of individual emergence learns that the sharing of ideas with others develops ideas in self. The ancients were aware of this fact. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" means only that giving is a precondition to reception. This relates to the nature of energy. Reflect, for instance, on hydraulic energy. Conceive of a body of water impounded by a dam. Now protrude a pipe through the dam so as to tap the water. If the pipe be capped on the dry side, no water will flow out, nor will any flow into the pipe. Now remove the cap. Immediately the pipe will give off water and at the other end will receive water in an equal amount. The potential energy of the impounded water will change to moving, power-giving, kinetic energy. But note that the giving off is a precondition to reception. This is the nature of energy, be it hydraulic, intellectual, or spiritual. Here we can paraphrase the Golden Rule: Give unto others as you would have others give unto you.

When self-interest is identified with self-perfection, self-interest dictates that one make available to others as one would have others make available to him. With all eyes cast upward in the spirit of inquiry and the search for truth, truth itself is advanced. Only in-gathering processes bring forth the truth; thrusting-at devices send truth scurrying.

But regardless of all the foregoing reasons to the contrary, many who dislike state socialism still insist on selling or propagandizing or proselytizing on behalf of liberty. "How can I reach the masses? or "How can I correct the thinking of those millions who cannot see what I so clearly understand?" runs the refrain. If we magnify this reformatory attitude, so as to read its fine print, the fallacy is apparent. Assume that I have a magic ring; I need only put it on my finger to make every citizen's position a carbon copy of my free market, private property, limited government views. No cost in time or money! All of my ideas greeted by everyone with "You are absolutely right!" No deviation but only agreement! Would I put on this ring with its power automatically to cast all others in my ideological image? Most emphatically, I would not! To do so would put an end to all growth in others, and in me -- an affront to my premise as well as to Creation's scheme of perpetual hatching. Were reforming the masses a possibility -- which it is not -- success would spell disaster.

No individual can ever be secure in his libertarian beliefs except as the philosophy of liberty and the imperatives of liberty are an

3/ Le Maitre de la Mystique: Saint Pierre d' Alcantara. Fr. Stephane. J. Piat. Editions Franciscaines, Paris, 1959. Page 56.

outgrowth of his own developing intellectual and spiritual faculties. What cannot be done to inspire, attract, and draw out that growth should be discarded as not only useless, but downright harmful.

Once an individual who would advance liberty has settled on self-perfection as correct method, the first fact to bear in mind is that ours is not a numbers problem. Were it necessary to bring a majority into a comprehension of the libertarian philosophy, the cause of liberty would be utterly hopeless. Every significant movement in history has been led by one or just a few individuals with a small minority of energetic supporters. The leaders have come from strange and odd places; they could not have been predicted ahead of time. One, I recall, was born in a manger. Another, the leader of a bad movement, was an Austrian paper hanger. Who, more than any other, will advance liberty in America? I do not know; you do not know; that very individual does not know, for each person is possessed of aptitudes and potentialities about which he or she is unaware.



To present the problem as I see it a chart is needed. Look at the Ace of Diamonds with the card held lengthwise. This diamond chart is to represent all adult Americans. Let the tip at the left symbolize the very few articulate protagonists of authoritarianism and the tip at the right the very few articulate protagonists of the free market economy and its related legal, ethical, and spiritual institutions. Between these two opposed types of intellectuals are the many millions, more or less indifferent to this particular problem, as uninterested in understanding the nature of society and its economic and political institutions as are most people in understanding the composition of a symphony. These millions, at best, are only listeners or followers of one intellectual camp or the other. Professor Ludwig von Mises poses the problem precisely as I see it. I quote from his great work, Human Action:

The masses, the hosts of common men, do not conceive any ideas, sound or unsound. They only choose between the ideologies developed by the intellectual leaders of mankind. But their choice is final and determines the course of events. If they prefer bad doctrines, nothing can prevent disaster. ^{4/}

As much as Professor Mises and Lord John Maynard Keynes may have differed, they saw eye-to-eye on this matter. Keynes wrote:

The ideas of economists and political philosophers both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is generally understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical

^{4/} Human Action. 1963 edition, by Ludwig von Mises. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 864.

men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. 5/

But, first, who are these millions, these "hosts of common men"? Rarely does an individual think of himself as included -- only others belong to the masses! A great deal of mischief springs from such inaccurate self-appraisal. As related to the problem here in question, any person -- be he wealthy or poor, a Ph.D. or unschooled, a political bigwig or voter, a captain of industry or an unskilled worker -- qualifies as a member of the masses if he does not conceive ideas, sound or unsound. Conversely, financial or educational or occupational status is not a controlling factor in determining "the intellectual leaders of mankind." These leaders are the ones who conceive ideas, be they right or be they wrong, and they come from all stations of life. These definitions are important to what follows.

Today, the masses are listening to and following the intellectual leaders at the left. The reason is that the intellectuals at the right have not done and are not doing their homework; indeed, most of them have little inkling of either the need for or the nature of such homework.

I wish to repeat that the strategy of achieving a free market economy -- or, the same thing, advancing liberty -- does not require "selling the masses," that is, bringing the "hosts of common men," or what Keynes called "practical men," into a state of comprehension. Were that the problem, I would have given up the ghost long ago.

In any event, we -- you and I -- are concerned exclusively with the excellence of the few -- the very few -- at the right, whoever they may turn out to be.

While true leadership is exercised by ideas and not persons, ideas do manifest themselves through persons and, therefore, I must personalize leadership. No doubt there are as many levels of leadership as there are individuals who can be identified among the intellectuals at the right but, for illustrative purposes, I shall confine my remarks to three ascending categories of leadership.

THE FIRST LEVEL of leadership requires that the individual achieve that degree of understanding which makes it impossible for him to join in or lend advocacy in any manner whatsoever to any socialistic proposal; in short, he refrains from all ideological wrongdoing.

I can only make guesstimates as to numbers, but I suspect that there are not more than one in every 400 who can move from the millions to the few, even at this initial level. This level of attainment

requires no "original" thinking, writing or talking, but it is more than an incidental step. It takes a lot of doing! For instance, to avoid supporting any socialism requires an intimate understanding of what socialism is, the misleading labels and nicknames under which it appears, and the subtle ways it insinuates itself into social action and behavior. Few people in the U.S.A. are able to recognize the nature of a socialistic practice once it has been Americanized. They think of a policy as socialistic only as and if it is practiced by such avowed socialists as the Russians. In order not to impair liberty and the free market, one must be able to identify and understand local socialism. Every one of our practices has to be brought under rigorous inspection and scrutiny and examined in the light of socialism's double-barreled definition which is: Government ownership and control of the means and/or the results of production. Once the definition is thoroughly comprehended, then the initiate must test all practices and policies in the light of the definition and make accurate judgments as to whether or not the practices and policies are socialistic, that is, anti-free market. If they turn out to be antagonistic to liberty and the free market, then he does nothing to encourage them. The initiate has only to do no ideological wrong.

But we must not underestimate the enormous influences set in motion by the individual who refuses to sanction or promote unsound actions. Pronounced exemplary qualities have unbelievable radiating powers. The person who gives no offense to free market ideals -- even if he be utterly silent -- attracts emulators, sets high standards for those others who do no more than follow.

THE SECOND LEVEL of leadership requires that the individual achieve that degree of understanding and exposition which makes it natural and easy for him (first) to point out the fallacies of socialism and (second) to explain the principles of liberty and the free market to those who come within his own orbit. The persons who arrive at this level are the very few who emerge from the first level, perhaps fewer than one in 10,000.

Not only can these individuals perceive ideas conceived by others but they can themselves conceive ideas; in short, they are creative thinkers, writers, talkers of the free market philosophy; this quality is now in their make-up.

At this level the individual knows our free market subject. He can spin off the fallacies of socialism and the principles of freedom with the same ease and facility that he can answer "49" to the question, "What's 7 times 7?" He is, in fact, the true student of liberty and has emerged beyond the point where, in order to answer a question, he has to "think it through." On many matters, the "thinking through" has been done.

It is at this level that stance -- one's attitude toward others -- becomes of great importance. There is the inevitable temptation, once a person comes into possession of ideas new to him, to inflict his new "wisdom" on others, to reform them. So far as the advancement

of our ideas and ideals is concerned, the effects of this tactic are the opposite of those intended. It will send scurrying not only strangers but friends as well. Little more is accomplished than to earn the reputation of "a pest."

If one will wait patiently for others to recognize his newly acquired competence -- relax until others are ready to listen and share his views -- closed minds will open and become receptive, at least, those minds which are susceptible to opening. Indeed, no person can gain access to the mind of another until the other lets him in. It is the other who carries the keys and who unlocks the doors to his own perception. Prior to his decision to let us in, we are helpless. The "eager beaver" shows bad stance, and is rarely if ever admitted.

THE THIRD LEVEL of leadership requires that the individual achieve that degree of excellence in understanding and exposition which will inspire others to seek him out as a tutor.

At this level there is no limit as to how far one may go. An early bishop of the church wrote his "Confessions." It is the most widely purchased autobiography in the world today; countless thousands seek the tutorship of a man who passed away more than fifteen centuries ago. Probably not one in 10 million reach such a pinnacle as this, although there are quite a few who emerge from the second level whose counsel is sought, whose tutorship is pursued, now and then.

I hasten to add that I am not at this level but I am aware of it and know some of its imperatives.

One imperative is the awareness that the higher grade the objective is, the higher grade must the method be. Suppose, for example, that I have a low-grade objective in mind: your demise. Reflect on the low-grade methods I could use to achieve it. Move to a higher grade objective: making a poet of you. The method would have to be higher grade; the very first requirement would be making a poet of myself.

If we move on to a still higher objective -- spreading an understanding of individual liberty and the free market -- we can resort to no lesser method than the power of attraction, the absolute opposite of the reforming, propagandizing, thrusting-at technique.

To illustrate the power of attraction, let us consider some minor subjects: When I go to the golf club, the members do not seek my tutorship; they are aware of my incompetency. But wave a magic wand and make of me an Arnold Palmer or Sam Snead and every member will sit at my feet or drink at my fountain, as the sayings go. Or take cookery. Assume that I do not know how to scramble eggs. No one will ask me for recipes. However, were I as competent as the great Escoffier, most aspiring chefs would "hang on my every word."

The same principle of attraction holds good for any subject. As related to liberty and the free market, the tutorship of any real master will be sought without any advertising on his part. A good way to

test how well one is doing on the objective we have in mind is to observe how many are seeking one's counsel. If none, then one can draw his own conclusions!

The power of attraction, I suggest, flows from those who develop what Hanford Henderson called "the aristocratic spirit." In whom is this to be found? Here is Henderson's answer:

He may be a day laborer, an artisan, a shopkeeper, a professional man, a writer, a statesman. It is not a matter of birth, or occupation, or education. It is an attitude of mind carried into daily action, that is to say, a religion. The aristocratic spirit is the disinterested, passionate love of excellence...everywhere and in everything; the aristocrat, to deserve the name, must love it in himself, in his own alert mind, in his own illuminated spirit, and he must love it in others; must love it in all human relations and occupations and activities; in all things in earth or sea or sky. 6/

Let us return now to the aforementioned diamond-shaped grouping of the population and contemplate the task of the few at the right. Only through the unprecedented excellence of these few can "the hosts of common men" be turned around and drawn toward them. It will take an enormous power of attraction to bring this about and, thus, avert disaster. But nothing less will accomplish our task.

Perhaps a better way to express the power of attraction thesis is: Go only where called, but do everything within one's power to qualify to be called. I refer to more than calls for lectures or seminars. Wait for the call from friend or foe, even from one's husband or wife or business associate. If you are a source of light, which is your responsibility, and if another is seeking light, which is his responsibility, count on it, you will be called.

After many years of trial and error, I have learned how to begin a conversation with a stranger so that he or she cannot help but ask, "What, pray tell, do you do?" There's the first call -- not much but it's a start. The response to a brief explanation of my vocation will quickly reveal whether or not the stranger is interested in advancing liberty. If not, I return to my reading or writing or pondering; if affirmative, I give as best I can of what is sought.

This method of uncovering the rare, potential workers in liberty's vineyard is simple enough: refrain from telling everything one knows; leave room for curiosity; generate questions; stimulate the spirit of inquiry. A little practice and this method becomes second nature.

I think I have proof that these theories work in practice, but first let me post a few warning signs that may help avoid discouragement.

6/ Excerpted from an article by Hanford Henderson entitled "The Aristocratic Spirit" which appeared as a reprint in The North American Review, March 1920.

First -- Many concede that self-improvement is good theory but that it is too slow; "We're running out of time," they say. Actually, time is elastic; there's more time than any one of us knows how to use profitably. Further, this time objection reveals that the objector is more concerned about saving the world than himself. If the attention is focused on individual growth and emergence, there is only one appropriate question: Am I working as diligently and as intelligently on advancing my own understanding as possible? If the answer is affirmative, then draw the obvious conclusion: Managing the shape of humanity is God's, not my, problem.

Second -- Whom the gods would destroy they first make angry, said the Greeks. Avoid at all costs any anger, depression, discouragement, frustration, name-calling. Always maintain an unruffled disposition. Any work which is not joyous has flaws that ought to be identified and done away with.

Third -- Do not be led astray by the fact that intellectuals of the authoritarian school succeed in advancing authoritarianism by propagandizing and selling-the-masses techniques. Merely keep in mind that the methods found useful in destroying liberty are not at all appropriate for creating a free society. Destruction is opposed to creation and these objectives are achieved by different rather than by identical forces.

Fourth -- Were all of us, including those who are now authoritarians, to adopt the self-improvement methodology, our ideological controversy would disappear. For it is self-evident that those who stick to improving selves are not meddlers in the affairs of others, and if there were no meddlers there would be no state socialism. Correct methodology is all-important.

Fifth -- Assuming competent discussion leaders and moderators, study groups and seminars are excellent training devices for those whose common interests are the advancement of liberty. These are of voluntary make-up, each participant drawing on what the others have to give. Such study groupings have up-grading possibilities, that is, they tend to prepare each participant to go on his own power. No one can be very helpful if he needs to be led by the hand.

Sixth -- The fact that only one in hundreds of individuals encountered shows any interest in or aptitude for the free market or libertarian philosophy should be no cause for discouragement. This is simply a common blindness; there is yet no eye to see the subject; the blindness is the problem! Keep in mind self-improvement and the related fact that the art of becoming is composed of acts of overcoming. The blindness, be it recognized, is an obstacle to overcome -- a stimulus to self-improvement. Reflect, for instance, on subterranean animals and those committed to the depths of the ocean -- living in utter darkness. They have no eye to see. What brings forth the eye? Why, light itself brings forth the eye! The kind of light that can be measured in candle power works on the same principle as that inner light: enlightenment. Enough enlightenment will develop eyes

to see the freedom philosophy. In a word, our task is to increase our own candle power. Is this not what our earthly existence is for?

Seventh -- Many of my friends think of themselves as not smart or bright or educated enough to generate that enlightenment which will bring forth the eye in others. Perish the thought! The biggest generator ever built gives no light when it is shut down; a tiny firefly gives light when its apparatus is turned on. The individual who gives light -- regardless of his intellectual level -- is the person who is in an improving state. Anyone should be able to figure out why this is so.

Now for a demonstration of how these recommended methods work in practice. I had written in our monthly journal, The Freeman, a critique of recent airline strikes. I contended that there was no moral right to strike, that is, to forcibly prevent willing workers from occupying the vacated jobs. This evoked a three-page letter from a labor union organizer -- a vicious diatribe.

Using the turn-the-other-cheek approach, my reply took no cognizance of his ill-temper, none whatsoever. It was as high-grade as I would write the Lord. His response was the most abject apology I have ever read. The man was "crushed" to think he had written in such a vein to one who reacted as I did. There followed a thank you note along with two small books, my Why Not Try Freedom? and Harper's Why Wages Rise. His reply, "This is the best stuff I have ever read. Send me more." I sent five volumes. Some weeks later, he wrote: "I authorize you to become my director of reading. Send me anything which in your judgment will help my thinking, and with invoice." I might add that by this time he had changed his occupation. After months of an interesting and friendly correspondence, I had occasion to visit his city. We spent the forenoon together, and following a luncheon at which I lectured, he asked if he might drive me to the airport. Our dialogue went something like this:

"Bill, do you remember that first letter of yours?"

"Yes," he replied with a blush.

"Suppose I had replied in kind. Would you and I be riding together?"

"I'll say we wouldn't!"

"Bill, let me explain what I did to you." Holding my plane ticket against the windshield, I asked, "What holds it there?"

He replied, "The tension of your finger."

"You are right, Bill. It is known as the law of polarity or the tension of the opposites. Now, observe what happens when the tension is removed." Of course the ticket fell to

the floor. "Bill, that's precisely what I did to you. I removed the tension; I gave you nothing to scratch against." I then quoted an old Arab proverb, "He who strikes the second blow starts the fight."

"Bill, I found no need to strike back against you, and there has been no fight; you and I are friends.

This true story has a punch line. Perhaps two years later there came a period of three months and no word from Bill -- most unusual. Finally, a letter explaining that he had been in a head-on auto collision, that he was still in the hospital after ninety days, and then this: "...but, Mr. Read, you should see the interest my three doctors are showing in our philosophy."

A final word: Ideas, be they right or wrong, are indestructible. The only possible change is people's attitude toward them. There is indifference or acceptance or rejection. Ideas on liberty are greeted more by indifference than by rejection, an attitude that tends to harden if left undisturbed. But when we try to turn indifference into acceptance by obtrusive and officious methods we get only rejection for our pains and, for good reason: these are not the methods of liberty.

The sole force that will turn indifference into acceptance is the power of attraction. And this can be achieved only if the eye is cast away from the remaking of others and toward the improvement of self. This, as an aim, is in harmony with personal and human evolution; the effort demanded of each individual is not a sacrifice, but the best investment one can make in life's highest purpose.

